

SOLICITING, RETAINING AND GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR STAKEHOLDERS

**LSC Technology Initiative Grant Conference
Wednesday January 21, 2004
2:30 p.m.–3:45 p.m.**

LSC's State Planning Initiative

In 1998, the Legal Services Corporation, a major investor in civil equal justice in every state, determined that it had a duty to stimulate the most effective means of delivering legal services to low-income and vulnerable people. The state planning initiative, as defined in Program Letter 98-1 and 98-6 and later expanded in Program Letter 2000-007, was a call for states to identify, design and implement—in a principled and thoughtful manner—the structural and service delivery system changes necessary to ensure that our civil equal justice system is equal to the tasks facing it and the challenges facing our clients now and into the next century. These program letters articulated LSC's belief that every organization within a state's equal justice community has an important and strategic role to play in creating and maintaining a state-based civil equal justice system that efficiently and effectively works for all low-income residents in the state. In contrast to earlier years when it arguably may have been sufficient that a program operate within its own service area boundaries in an effective, efficient and high-quality manner, state planning is devoted to and concerned about the *totality of the effort in each state*.

Using this new lens, programs were asked to report on how they would coordinate and integrate their work in seven important issues:

- enhancing client access; efficiently delivering high quality legal assistance;
- **effectively using technology to expand access and enhance services;**
- promoting client self-help and preventive legal education and advice;
- managing legal work and training staff;
- coordinating and collaborating with the private bar;
- developing additional resources to support legal services delivery; and
- designing a legal services delivery configuration that enhanced client services, reduced barriers and operated efficiently and effectively.

State planning continues to be one of LSC's primary initiatives for enhancing quality and expanding access.

The Nexus between LSC's State Planning Initiative and the TIG Program

The Technology Initiative Grant Program is an important LSC initiative. However, it is neither a *stand-alone* initiative nor a *primary* initiative. As must every other LSC programmatic initiative, the TIG program must operate to advance LSC's primary initiatives which, loosely put, can be summarized as promoting healthy programs and encouraging vibrant state justice communities. It must endeavor at all times to address the overarching concepts key to state planning: comprehensiveness; coordination; integration; and high quality. These concepts apply to every program or initiative funded by LSC – including TIG.

Stakeholder Committees

In the case of statewide websites, there can be no question that these websites—assuming they receive LSC dollars—must comport with the basic tenets of the state planning initiative. First, they are statewide. And second, one of the key hallmarks of a viable state justice community—whether it *effectively uses technology to expand access and enhance services*—is also the reason that LSC funds statewide websites (and requires stakeholder committees).

LSC believes that it is virtually impossible for a statewide website to operate to expand access and enhance services in the absence of a viable stakeholders committee. Indeed, future grants for TIG-funded statewide websites will be closely scrutinized to determine the extent to which the statewide website is:

- coordinated among all equal justice stakeholders within a state;
- comprehensive both in its level of information and in terms of clients served;
- coordinated among all equal justice stakeholders; and
- "owned" by the equal justice community.

Principles of "Ownership" as They Apply to Stakeholder Committees

While *ownership* can be a legal condition, it is also a psychological state.

A healthy ownership culture is one where the perceived rights and responsibilities of *ownership* are in balance. Problems arise when they are not in balance—when a culture is "rights heavy" or "responsibilities heavy".

The connection between a healthy ownership culture and performance is not empty rhetoric or wishful thinking—numerous studies have established a solid link between *ownership* and increased productivity and enhanced excellence of product (as well as increased profits in the private sector).

Obtaining an accurate assessment of your stakeholder culture to determine the presence or absence of a healthy perception of ownership is important—*what doesn't get measured doesn't get done*. (Edward Deming).

Measurement is a crucial part of building an ownership culture because it is impossible to make solid plans for the future without an accurate understanding of current conditions.

A survey of both the current members of a stakeholder committee as well as the entire equal justice community can provide valuable data to help obtain an accurate measure of the extent to which the statewide website is "owned" by the state justice community.

Criteria for a good survey: it should be built for stakeholder ownership; it should produce meaningful information/data; it should be *goal—appropriate*; it should be both expansive and inclusive; and most importantly, the information should be used to improve the stakeholder committee—i.e., information gleaned should not fall into a black hole.

Criteria for a Healthy, Vibrant and Relevant Stakeholder Committee

- It is *owned* by the entirety of its membership.
- The *membership* makes all important decisions.
- Its membership is reflective of the entire state.
- It is *inclusive*. Representatives from all important equal justice stakeholders participate and all have a voice.
- Committee members receive appropriate *training*.
- Sufficient *resources* are allocated for its work.
- It continually solicits *suggestions for improvement* from the greater equal justice community.
- It periodically *assesses* itself and measures its progress.